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ABSTRACT

This paper stresses the idea that teacher communication in the classroom affects the self-concept of students. It begins by reviewing the process of communication and the effect of self-concept on that process by providing and discussing an intrapersonal communication process model. It then provides instructor guidelines for self-concept enhancement and evaluation followed by a checklist for evaluating the instructor in areas related to self-concept enhancement. The paper next provides an outline for considering levels of empathy that can be utilized by a teacher and a set of general guidelines for self-concept enhancement. It concludes with a selected bibliography for teacher communication in the classroom and the effects it has on student self-concept. (TJ)

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**TEACHER COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM:
EFFECTS ON STUDENT SELF-CONCEPT**

**Presented at the Annual Meeting of
American Association of School Administrators
Anaheim, California
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As we examine self-concept theory, four basic propositions emerge which focus attention on the importance of teacher communication in the classroom:

1. Self-concept (one's total perceptual appraisal of oneself--physically, socially, academically, and psychologically) guides and directs behavior.
2. An individual's self-concept can be modified or changed in certain social interactions.
3. Although there are a variety of ways self-concept develops (e.g., labeling dominant behavior patterns, and social comparisons), self-concept develops primarily through interactions (communication) with others.
4. The more influential interactions are those involving significant others--those persons who reinforce the individual's perception of him/herself.

Since the teacher continually provides feedback to students regarding their talents and abilities through both verbal and nonverbal interactions, the teacher can become a major significant person in the development, maintenance, and hopefully enhancement of the student's self-concept. The teacher's role in instruction and evaluation becomes BASIC to how students perceive themselves, which in turn is BASIC to their achievement (behavior) in the classroom.

We need to make certain our teachers help ENHANCE the student's self-concept, realizing that an enhanced self-concept is NOT an inflated view of oneself, but rather a realistic perception of one's strengths and weaknesses, and an acceptance of that perception. One method used to enhance students' self-concepts is to discuss self-concept theory with them--so that they understand how and why they perceive themselves and their abilities as they do. A second approach, however, and the focus of my presentation, deals with teacher behavior; i.e., the teacher's methods of interaction and evaluation of students in the classroom.

Thus, my presentation will (a) review the process of communication, and the effect of self-concept on that process; (b) discuss the effects of teacher interaction/evaluation on the students' self-concepts; and (c) provide a list of Instructor Guidelines (based on relevant theoretical and experimental literature) to enhance students' self-concepts in the classroom setting.

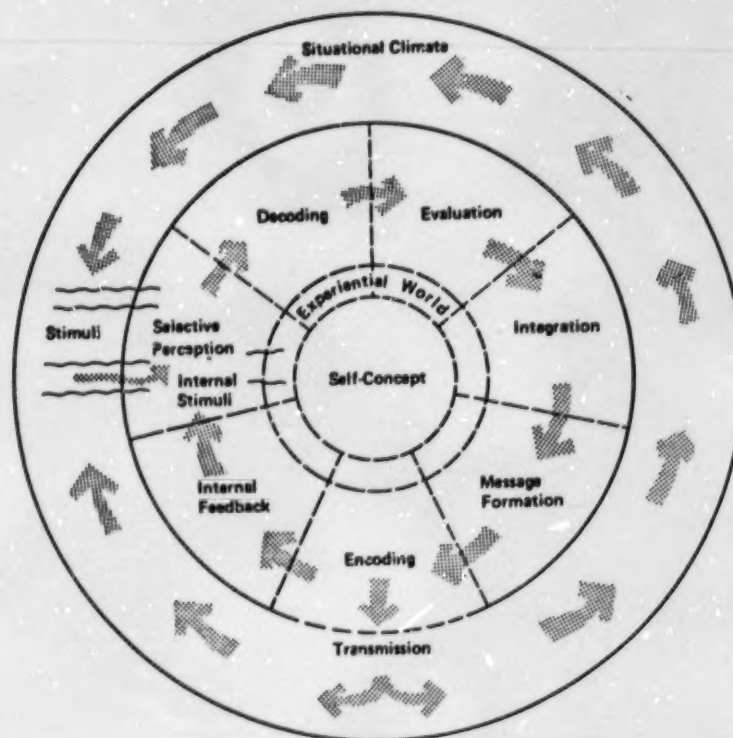


Figure 1.1. The intrapersonal communication process.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the intrapersonal communication process. An individual's self-concept is at the heart of the process, since one's self-concept determines the stimuli selected and the way in which the stimuli will be decoded, evaluated, and integrated into the individual's self-system. The self-concept also determines the message to be transmitted and how it will be sent. As the dotted lines indicate, the self-concept affects and is affected by one's experiential world—all the information accumulated during one's lifetime, including cultural experiences, knowledge, abilities, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings, as well as needs, goals, and expectations for the future. In turn, the person's experiential world affects the entire process of intrapersonal communication. As Figure 1.1 indicates the process is ongoing, circular, and operates as long as stimuli from the situational climate (time, place, and circumstances) or experiential world bombard the individual.

from: Carolyn M. Del Polito. Intrapersonal Communication. Menlo Park, CA: Cummings Publishing Company, 1977, p.3.

SELF-CONCEPT ENHANCEMENT AND EVALUATION

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Instructor Guidelines

1. Facilitate student-centered learning. Actively assist students to see themselves as planning, purposing, choosing individuals, responsible and accountable. Students can grow, flourish, and develop much more readily when the significant person "projects an inherent trust and belief in their capacity to become what they have potential to become" (Hamachek, 1971, p. 202).
2. Help students to select experiences which reflect their own particular needs, interests, and concerns, provide a challenge, and yet help maximize success. Not all students will be motivated in the same way or interested in the same things; the instructor needs to make success more available in more different ways.
3. Personalize your teaching. Appear sincere, uncalculating, and attuned to students as individuals.
4. Provide the student with flexible, yet definite goals for success. When limits are clear, the individual learns to rely on his/her own judgments and interpretations of events and consequences. This is particularly important for the highly anxious student who requires a structured situation in which to operate.
5. Highlight the student's specific strengths, assets, and skills to aid the student in sorting out his/her own strengths and weaknesses. The student needs to know his/her own capabilities in order to gauge the probability of success.
6. Alleviate ambiguity, disrespect, and rejection in your interactions with students.
7. Maintain a classroom atmosphere of warmth and acceptance. The more positive the students' perceptions of their teacher's feelings toward them, the more positive their self-image, the better their achievement, and the more desirable their classroom behavior. In addition, teachers who like pupils tend to have pupils who accept and like each other.
8. Praise yourself. Recognize and acknowledge your own strong points in the presence of your students. Your recognition of your own strong points will provide an impetus for your students to praise themselves.
9. Do not prejudice your students. Be honest and accurate in your evaluations, while avoiding comparisons with peers. A teacher's expectations for a student's performance is a significant determinant of how the student actually responds.

Instructor Guidelines
Page 2

10. Personalize evaluative comments, giving encouragement to students. Evaluation, whether oral or written, which is more personal, in which the evaluator appears to take into consideration every action, attends to subtleties in behavior and modifies his/her appraisal accordingly, should have a greater impact on the student's self-concept.
11. Provide students with a continuous, long term exposure to a particular appraisal. From a credible and personalistic source, it should have profound effects on self-concept.
12. Provide classroom experiences for each student to receive acceptance from peers.
13. Provide classroom experiences for students to praise others. Persons with high self-esteem show greater acceptance of others.
14. Help students to evaluate themselves realistically. Evaluation should be based on the student's comparison of his/her actual performance with his/her own personal standards.
15. Urge students to concentrate on improvement, rather than perfection.
16. Provide classroom experiences for students to praise themselves. Self-accepting individuals tend to have higher self-concepts. Positive self-evaluation in the form of verbal reinforcements is positively related to self-concept.

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FOR SELF-CONCEPT ENHANCEMENT

Date

A. Instructor's Classroom Behavior:

1. Provides Student-Centered Learning
 - a. Students see themselves as planning, choosing, responsible, accountable individuals
 - b. Experiences = student needs
 - c. Experiences = challenge
 - d. Experiences = successful outcomes
2. Provides flexible, yet definite goals
3. Highlights students' strengths, assets, skills
4. Is Personalistic (sincere, uncalculating, attuned to students as individuals)
5. Provides warmth and acceptance
 - a. Alleviates rejection
 - b. Alleviates ambiguity
 - c. Alleviates disrespect
6. Praises him/herself

B. Evaluation (Oral and Written):

1. Honest and accurate
2. Avoids prejudgment
3. Personalistic
4. Encouraging
5. Avoids comparison with peers
6. Continuous, consistent appraisal

C. Classroom Experiences Help Students To:

1. Accept each other
2. Praise each other
3. Evaluate themselves realistically
4. Concentrate on improvement, not perfection
5. Praise themselves

5=Superior; 4=Above Average; 3=Average; 2=Below Average; 1=Poor

LEVELS OF EMPATHY

Level I: Maximum Understanding through Social Sensitivity

A. Understanding the Speaker's Perceptual World

1. Attitudes
2. Values
3. Beliefs
4. Knowledge
5. Culture
6. Social System
7. Past Experiences
8. Future Expectations

B. Understanding Our Own Perceptual World--Selective Perception

C. Understanding the Content Communicated--What is Being Said?

D. Understanding the Feelings Communicated--How is the Message Being Said?

Level II: Confirmation of Understanding through Active Listening

A. Attention During Communication

1. Nonverbally (attentive posture, head nods, eye-contact, facial expressions)
2. Verbally (vocalizations which indicate you're keeping up with the speaker and interested in the information communicated)

B. Reflection of Maximum Understanding of Other's Ideas

1. Verbally
2. Nonverbally

C. Reflection of Maximum Understanding of Other's Feelings

1. Verbally
2. Nonverbally

SELF-CONCEPT ENHANCEMENT

General Guidelines

To facilitate growth and learning through self-concept enhancement, we must:

1. Understand that we communicate what we are, not just what we say. We communicate our own self-concepts far more often than we communicate information (subject matter).
2. Understand that anything we do or say could significantly change an individual's attitude about himself/herself for better or for worse. We must understand the implications of our role as persons who are important or "significant" to others if we are to utilize that role properly.
3. Understand that individuals behave in terms of what seems to be true, which means many times communication occurs, not according to what the facts are, but according to how they are perceived.
4. Be willing to deal with what a message means to different people. In the truest sense of the word, we must be willing to deal with the interpretation of a subject as we are to deal with the information about it.
5. Understand that we are not likely to get results simply by telling someone he/she is worthy. Rather, we imply it through trust and the establishment of an atmosphere of mutual respect. One good way to start is to take time to listen to what others have to say and to use their ideas when possible.
6. Understand that behavior which is distant, cold, and rejecting is far less likely to enhance self-concept, than behavior which is warm, accepting, and discriminating.
7. Be willing to be flexible in your communication with others.

Teacher Communication in the Classroom

Effects on Student Self-Concept

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